

MR. EBERDEEN'S HOUSE¹

By ARTHUR JOHNSON

From The Century

IT loomed there, high and large, uncompromised by the gloom of mist about it, unruffled by the easterly gusts that bent the two rows of larches which stretched in deliberate diagonal lines from the street to the corners of its grim façade. Hastings could hear the beating of the sea; it was probably in that chaos of space behind the house. As he stood leaning against one of the tall gate-posts and surveying the scene, he began to feel, almost in spite of himself, in sympathy with it.

A motor drew up near where he stood. Instinctively his attention was directed from it to the green Georgian portal, which at the moment was drawn in to permit somebody to pass out. She was in glaring contrast to her setting; she was fresh and lovely, young and fashionable-looking. She paused on the wide stone step, glanced up at the sky, opened her umbrella, and briskly proceeded down the avenue to the gate. Within a few yards of it she raised her eyes from the puddled gravel and started back at sight of him.

"Jack!" she cried out. "How did you get here? Why didn't you tell me? I am this minute on my way to meet you."

"I'm admiring your summer home, Julia — Julia dear," he said to her, a little constrained. "It's sad and desolate, and everything that I suppose you want it to be. I expected to hate it. I thought that having spent

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most of my life away from all this, I should have lost every scrap of — tolerance for New England. But ever since I set foot in Rockface — ”

“ When *did* you, Jack? ” she demanded.

“ An hour ago. I ’ve been in the strangest mood ever since. ”

“ Come, now, and tell me about it, ” she suddenly saw the need to say, walking away from him to dismiss the grinning chauffeur.

Hastings lingered alone in the hall.

“ It ’s much nicer by the fire, ” Julia called to him impatiently from the next room. And he followed the sound of her voice; he moved slowly over to a chair, opposite her own, and sat down, forgetting to talk. “ I vow I ’m amused, ” she exclaimed, “ at the way you take it. You ’ve made letters full of fun of me for settling my parents ’ on that ugly little Massachusetts point ’; you ’ve laid it all down to my ’ Middle-Western love of Puritan relics ’ and ’ Eastern culturine, ’ and scorned my ’ romantic inexperience ’; and here you come, redolent of Europe, to be as much impressed by our choice as if you were a Montana school-girl! ” He smiled back, but it was obvious that he had n’t heard a word. “ What ’s the matter with you, Jacky? ” she asked interestedly; “ had a bad journey? ”

He tried to concentrate his faculties on looking genial and at the same time intelligent.

“ It was just like me, Julia, ” he began, the ghost of cheerfulness on his face. “ I took the earliest sort of train, instead of the one I telephoned you I ’d take. You see, to have landed at night, after all the years — think of it! And then to go walking around by myself, seeing things crop suddenly up that I had n’t thought of since — well — scarcely since I was born. No wonder I could n’t sleep. This morning, like a stranded idiot, I got out at that little way-station of yours, and realized for the first time that I did n’t have a blessed idea where you lived. ”

"Rockface is about as enormous as a biscuit. Anybody could have told you."

"That 's the strangest part of it," recollected Hastings. "You see, I had a curious hunch about it; I felt a little forsaken. I was actually surprised and irritated that somebody—I did n't know who—was n't waiting to meet me.

"There was something about the place, Julia," he gravely pursued, "made me feel justified in thinking a hospitable welcome was due me. . . . Oh I don't mean because you were here! But—well—the veil of sea-turn that half-hid the buildings across the square made me feel the need of some kind of greeting—I expected one!—right on the spot! Can you understand? And—instead—the cold east wind blew round me as if I were an outcast.

"I stole down the first crooked street I came to. I stared at the house-fronts, at the little square panes of the sagging window-sashes, at the dingy doors, with those short, steep flights of steps leading down to the side-walks."

Julia sobered to a tentative frown. Jack's eyes were bigger than usual, and he did look, notwithstanding the feverish flush on his cheeks, rather fagged. How she had been counting the days for him to come! It did n't seem possible that the visit which he had been promising for so long to make her should have finally materialized. Was n't it really an indication,—she pondered while again happily she sized up the situation,—if he took so much trouble for her, that he did, after all, care more perhaps than she had sometimes thought? But what an extraordinary meeting it had been! He had at once launched forth on this extreme discourse. She sat back, and let her eyes rest on him with amused tolerance, her smile attentively adjusted to suit his mood; for her moment's anxiety vanished at further sight of his strong, broad shoulders and the handsome appearance he made in her favorite high-back chair, his firm hands grasping the arms of it.

"You've stayed away from America too long," she said carelessly; "Paris is bad for you."

He leaned forward, his delicately modeled cheekbones emphasized by the firelight, his hair becomingly awry.

"I *knew* it would all be as it was," he went inspiringly on. "There was a thick clump of hedge, cold and dreary in the mist, that awoke pictures of a prison I used to dread the sight of when I was — I don't know how old. Once I partly thought I must be dreaming; so I put out my hand and touched the wet, sodden picket of an old fence. I looked suspiciously behind me. But there was only an old man behind, fully two hundred yards away. Then the idea came to me that it would be a relief to talk to somebody; I had n't interchanged a word with any one since I got off the ship. All kinds of impressions, you see, had been accumulating, and they thronged like phantoms about me.

"I wanted to hear myself speak — to see if I could. So I turned, and waited for him to come. The rain was dripping all around; there was n't another sound anywhere. Now, this is the queerest thing of all: what do you think I said to him?" Jack leaned forward, his eyes darting intensely over her face. "I said: 'Can you tell me the way to Mr. Eberdeen's house?'"

"Mr. — *Eberdeen's* house!" She stood abruptly up. "Who — who told you," she gasped, "that this was Mr. Eberdeen's house?"

He stood up, too, stepping back from her. "You must have told me," he said, aware of his quivering lips, "in one of your letters. The name came to me —"

"I never told you," she stated emphatically, "I never told any one — for — for — why did you ask such a question of that old man?"

His gaze wandered.

"My throat felt parched from disuse. It took a distinct effort to make the words sound articulate.

"'Sure, now,' answered the old man, while I was still

puzzling to explain to myself the question I had asked him, 'but never have I heard it called *that* — not since my father died from the cold he caught drivin' the mare up from Portsville. Ther' was a time, in the days when they talked of it bein' ha'nted, you'd hear folks call it Eberdeen Manor; but not — no, and my father likely's been dead these forty years now — never, Mr. Eberdeen's house!"

"'Mr. Eberdeen — there was such a person, then?'"

"'There'll be a time, me boy, when they'll doubt yerself was a living thing.' He straightened his bent body reprehensibly; he shook his head. 'Walk back to the next corner,' he muttered, 'and turn to yer left. It'll be down there ber the cliffs, if nobody's stolen it. Somebody'll sure 'nough be there ter point it out to yer.'

"'I'm a stranger,' I apologized; 'I really did n't know.'

"'Know!' he shouted. 'Who was it owned the land this 'ere street runs over? Who built it? Who was it paid fer the church on the hill? Who did fer the sick, and gave to the poor, and got nothin' hisself fer the trouble but grief and loneliness and a broken heart? Wher' did yer come from?'"

"And he surveyed me, as if the mere fact of his seeing me for the first time made him doubt my intentions. Still I stood there waiting.

"'What was he like? What did he do? Who was he?' I could n't help flinging out in my wonderment.

"'As good's'll ever come back from wher' yer've been, or'll pray fer the like of yer, I reckon. Judge not, I tell yer, that yer be not yerself judged.'

"I tried to smile at the old man.

"'Good-day to yer,' he grumbled, and walked back in the direction from which he had come. I watched until he was lost in the thickness."

Julia looked at Hastings in astonishment. Just another glimmer of anxiety crossed her mind; but any foolish

worry she might have had for him was merged in her consciousness of something indeed more staggering.

"Do you think," she brooded, "that it can be true — that — that the house is — *was* — haunted?"

"I had," Jack unresponsively continued — "I could n't help it — on the way a queer loathing of the little village. The gaunt house-fronts obtruded themselves so obstinately, so self-satisfiedly, like anemic country parsons, with their eyes close together, giving me a mean, soulless stare. Every object testified to its lack of any temperamental share in the joy of living. The emptiness of the streets seemed pitiless; their narrowness was oppressive."

"I love every inch of it," said Julia, defiantly.

Hastings was silent. He looked at the dry, colorless walls, covered with circuitous lines of crackling old paint.

"Was this furniture here, Julia?" he asked.

"Not this," she exclaimed with pride.

"No wonder," he argued half to himself, "that the next generation preferred black walnut, even with all its grapes and gewgaws! Horrible as it was, it was n't so orthodox and priggish and mirthless as what came before."

He strayed out into the hall again; he viewed its stateliness, its expurgated elegance. "Well, this has got me, Julia — seriously," he said with a surprised realization that she was standing beside him. "It's — it's immense."

"Oh, *that*," she cried out, "from *you!*" And slowly she stepped closer to say something to him; but she thought better of it. "Don't you think," she just let slip, "I've made it look at least — well — *old?*"

"As only a Westerner could want to make it look." His sense of humor affectionately covered any lack of enthusiasm.

"Come, Jacky," she urged at last, "I'll show you all of it before lunch is ready."

The stairs rose straight in the rear of the hall, directly

opposite the main entrance, with its border of finely traceried windows, branching squarely to right and left two thirds of the way up. By the first door above the side whither Julia conducted her guest she stepped fondly back and announced:

"This, Jack, is your room. I hope you will like it."

"Yes," he murmured, distractedly gazing about him.

Despite the freshness of everything, despite the new woolen carpets, with their correct geometric designs, ones Julia had had copied from some battered relics which she had somehow acquired, despite the new chintzes and the recently refinished furniture so deliberately assembled there for the first time, despite the spickness and spanness of each suitably collected detail of the room's decorations, a musty smell in the air caught his breath. The floor swooped reminiscently down toward the right; the boards of it made a stifled creak as he stepped across them. He himself was a little unsteady. The window gave on impenetrable fog. Hastings threw up the sash and peered out into the dampness; he heard the sound of unseen boats groping their ways through the distance; the water lapped and laved below him.

"Jack!" Julia called.

He turned to her, dazed, smiling in that way he had of trying to conceal his consciousness of inattention.

"Of course, it seems plain and spare and — rather humble, after Europe. I know *that*."

As if directed by her words, his eyes swept rapidly over the room.

"It's no use, Julia," he answered; "if you're New England to the core, you can't get free of it. I'd like every drop of New England blood drained out of me, and something — say Hebrew or — or Middle-West," he laughed, "substituted in place of it. To you this is 'pretty' and 'cozy' and — and 'cheerful'; to me — well, it's like an orgy of blue laws; it's the personification of witch-lore — like self-inflicted penance for I

don't know what." He glanced at her in excitement, shifting his hands uneasily in and out of his pockets.

"Yes," she said slowly. "I had thought, nevertheless, that you might like it."

"Like it?" he echoed. "That's the trouble. I wish I weren't so full of the meaning of it all. Can you fancy how a monk might feel, who'd been away on a vacation, just getting back to his cell? *Like* it? I can't help liking it. It's my proper setting; I see that fast enough. But I've come back to find how inexorable and harsh and catechismical it is, and naturally I resent being what I am. Oh—" he broke off, suddenly realizing the folly of his harangue, and after another moment he added: "It's delightful, Julia dear, really. If only all the Westerners could come to New England and revive it—and all the New-Englanders move West and revive themselves!"

They went on from room to room.

"You Westerners," Hastings reiterated — "oh, I don't just know what the difference is, for you're New England, too. Only you've got so much else mixed up with it. You've become free-lances; your more recent, less bigoted adventures have made you forget."

"What?" asked Julia, indignantly.

But he was at a loss, as he looked about him, to explain, however much each new survey of the scene convinced him. "Here," he muttered, "everything has been steeping so long in the attenuated resolutions that drove us to come; everything is still conscientiously soaked — saturated — in the barren memory of it."

"*You're* not," said Julia, testily, to draw him out. "Precious little of it *you've* had! Two years at a school! You're more foreign than you are New England. Remember — your —"

"Yes. I don't forget I've one foreign ancestor to boast of, and bless Heaven for it! How my great-grandmother ever happened to marry — see this!" Hastings went on, incoherently catching her arm and waving his

other over the exquisite array of her "colonial" chamber. "Now, this, to you, is — well — it's as 'amusing' as if you'd tried to furnish a room to imitate one in Cinderella's palace, as 'interesting' as if you'd done it Louis Sixteenth, or — or — its meaning is hardly more personal to you than the room you furnished in Munich that winter." — She blushed admiringly at memory of their first meeting. — "The problem appealed to you, and you made it charming. But to me —"

"You really hate it," said Julia, determined to face the facts.

"I really love it," he retorted sadly, "the way you could n't help loving a parent, even though you might n't believe in him."

"Jack," she characteristically cried out to him again, "there is one thing more that I hardly dare show you then. You'll think me such a fool. I —"

A servant appeared to announce that luncheon was ready.

"Don't say anything to *them* against it," she told him on the way down.

That was n't, however, what made him silent during the meal. He took little part in the conversation except when Mr. and Mrs. Elliott plied him with questions, which he then found himself answering with only unsatisfactory vagueness — answers that he could do nothing, not even when Julia flew tenderly to his rescue, to make any better. Yes, he liked the house, he said gravely. It was a nice old house. And he thought how murky, despite its new coats of cleaning, was that far corner up near the ceiling. No, he was n't sorry, he responded, that he had left the École des Beaux Arts to devote all his time to painting; it was the one thing he was suited for. Yes, his foreign great-grandfather had been a portrait-painter. He could n't remember what his name was. Tremaine? Henry Tremaine. That was it. Julia was looking hard at him. She was gazing down at her plate. He knew he had eaten nothing. He

could not eat. No, he was n't at all hungry. Why was it so chilly? he thought. Doubtless he had picked up a germ. The house, he muttered to himself, was on his nerves. It was so everlastingly gloomy! Julia had re-inhabited it too authentically. "Eberdeen Manor" — "Mr. Eberdeen's House." What names!

An hour afterward he told Julia he was dead sleepy and that, contrary to all his habits, he was going up-stairs to take a nap. Dinner was at seven? All right, he would be in better shape by then. He felt wretchedly, but he did n't say so.

Out in the hall he paused a moment at the foot of the wide lower staircase. The ticking of a good many clocks came to him from different parts of the house; they seemed to focus their monotonous activity especially on his hearing. Extraordinary recollections swept him. He remembered having heard an old nurse, Sarah Teale, describe how her aunt once rushed out the back door right in the midst of frying doughnuts, and was instantly stricken with paralysis on account of it. There was a low groaning; a moan floated to him from somewhere above. Bravely he forced himself to climb the stairs toward it. He turned the knob. The door stuck. He shook it again, and it yielded.

II

It was nearly dark when he awoke. A late, a very late, an unnaturally late, afternoon dusk shadowed in streaks across the floor. He could hardly breathe. The windows were close shut. The striped shades were drawn down to the sills. But he could see the yellowed print of Da Vinci's "Last Supper" — the one he had bought at Milan — hanging on the panel above the empty hearth. There was the sand-shaker on his maple desk. That old lithograph of the two kittens over beside the bureau was crooked. He must remember to straighten it. The wall-paper was getting dingy.

He stretched himself. A sharp pain was going through his head. But it was late; he must get up and dress, or he would n't be ready in time.

The clothes he had just taken off lay across an arm of the painted chair by his bed. He lifted the coat, and let it fall from his grasp. He moved over to the wash-stand. The Chinese pitcher was as light as if filled with air when he turned its nose to the basin. The hat-tub stood on end between the wash-stand and the closet door. He reached for the battered old red tassel of the bell-rope and pulled it. It was so late, — it was getting later, — he must hurry, whether Simpkins came or not. He could manage. And he opened the closet door, sighing at the bothersome prospect of getting into his togs. He ran his hand over his hair. Where was the mirror? And, damme! he had no light!

The shoes were a trifle hard to draw on, too small for him; the breeches were badly in need of pressing; the coat was stiff. He began opening drawers in the bureau, delving through piles of neatly folded linen and silk. At last he chose a shirt and put it on over his head. He laid aside the purple satin waistcoat until he should have arranged his stock, which he found tight, and difficult to make meet in the back. But he finally got it adjusted; he brought the thick, wide ends around in front, tied them in a huge bow while he walked over to the window and gazed out. Fine night. The mist had gone, the stars were dimly appearing. He turned back for his waistcoat and jacket. By mistake he opened the closet door again instead of the one which led into the hall.

"I knew you would come!" she said, approaching so near to him from out the somber blackness of the garments which draped the walls that he could see her quite plainly by the light of the candle in her hand. She was n't a day over twenty. If she was pale, it was more the pallor of fright than of ill health, or perhaps only because her skin showed so white, lighted by the faint

glare, in contrast to her deep eyes and to the thick, glossy braids bound round and round above her forehead. "John, John, won't you speak to me?"

He took a step forward, faltering. At that moment there was a brusque movement beside him, and he turned to behold there a young man, dressed in knee-breeches, wearing a purple waistcoat and velvet coat, as like unto himself as his own image.

"Duty bade me come," the stranger answered stiffly, as if it was for his ears that her words had been intended.

Hastings' gaze flew to meet hers, which he was astonished to find still directed on him instead of on the speaker. He felt himself melted to pity by her frailness and beauty and charm, so that he turned almost angrily toward the intruder, who, at that moment, however, began to address her in tones Hastings could but admire:

"To you!" cried out the young stranger — "you, for whom duty knows no promptings!"

At that, Hastings turned to her again, his heart rent by the plea she uttered.

"But you love me? You love me? Oh, say it to me!" And she was looking not at his counterpart; she was imploring *him*, she was stretching her arms out to *him*, she was veritably making her plea to *him*, as if he were the one who had elicited it.

"I will do anything for you — anything!" he would have promised her had not the threat of the stranger so like unto himself interrupted.

"Don't mock my patience, Lydia," Hastings heard as once more he shifted his eyes to the speaker.

It was maddening how from one to the other of them his sympathies veered. The sepulchral voice of the man seemed to express Hastings' own thoughts; yet her sweet appeal awoke resentful fury for what words he dared say to her. If only Hastings might explain, when she stared so reproachfully, that it was only he who had spoken!

Momentarily at a loss, she put the candle down on a

little shelf. She rubbed her hands one about the other, as if her doing so might lessen the affront which she had now somehow to meet. When at last she spoke, her calm, even tones were like the loveliness of primroses; her eyes were brimming with simple trustfulness.

"You own me, O my husband," she said, "heart--heart, body, and soul. Do with me what you will."

Why should she be so abject? But when Hastings heard the voice of that other, he was again awed by it.

"Think not that I have n't avenged myself!" the voice sneeringly proclaimed.

Hastings looked. For the first time he noticed that the stranger's arm was in a sling; there was a mole on the cheek near the corner of those tightly compressed lips.

She shook like a leaf in a gale. For dread minutes she faced Hastings tremblingly. Coming nearer to him she murmured:

"Are you badly hurt, my — my husband?"

Hastings glanced down at his own arm, on which her eyes seemed to rest; then he suddenly beheld, almost as one beholds one's self in a mirror, his counterpart recoil from her reach while he exclaimed scornfully:

"Don't — don't touch me! Nor pray think that your wiles will ever win from me any forgiveness."

She stopped stock-still.

"Is he dead?" she demanded.

"Ah, then, you do admit, do you, that you love him?" the other flung at her. "Say it to me! say it to me!" he charged, and he half closed his eyes; "or — by Heaven! I will —"

Hastings felt the justice of this accusation, and turned doubtingly back to the girl for her answer. She stared at him, waiting.

"What is the use?" she asked in despair. "Would you believe me?"

"If you *confess* I will believe you," stated the stranger.

It seemed to Hastings that she grew visibly taller;

her face underwent a spasm of pain; and apparently unable longer to remain silent, she cried out to him:

"Can it be that for you a confession is more to be believed than aught which has not to be confessed?" And Hastings could feel the touch of her hand cold on his wrist.

But the other insisted so convincingly that Hastings looked at him once more with confidence.

"The truth," she said sadly, "is only for those who have faith; you — you prefer the sinner, whom you may crush into a penitent. Your egotism demands the power to forgive; you have not the courage to love."

The stranger took a step nearer her, but she was looking at Hastings.

"He is the only one who is worthy to believe me — he, whom you blame me for loving. I do love him, then, but with a love no codes of yours can understand. For I am innocent, to use the word by which you forgivingly call the unjustly accused."

Hastings quailed beneath the bitterness of her irony; he saw, too, how the man who so resembled him fell back against an old calico bag, stuffed with remnants probably, that hung on a hook right behind where he had been standing; but when he faced her once more, he marveled at the change in her appearance.

Her brows were raised, contracted gently, resolutely; her eyes were yearningly fixed on Hastings; her lips were parted tenderly for the generous appeal she had at last found the need to make to him.

"Forgive me, O my husband!" she begged. "Nothing can come between us, nothing shall. But I could not love you as I do if I loved not others — if, for the chance love that came my way, I should give in exchange no thanks. You understand me? You would not have me avoid what I was made to love? You would not have me disregard the sunlight and the sea and the stars in the sky? Yes, it is true, my husband, I loved him. He said that my fingers on the spinet made into harmony

all the discords of the day; he said that I wove them away, with the notes of birds and the sound of running brooks and the sighing of the wind, into patterns, as in the long winter evenings I could spin flax at my wheel. It made me happy to have him love me. It filled me with strength. It taught me many new things I could do for you. John, John, say that you forgive me?"

Though Hastings wanted to take her in his arms, he was impelled to turn away from her and to view that silent figure still leaning against the calico bag, whose head was lifted haughtily in deference to her supplication.

"He loved you, too," she continued to Hastings, "because you loved me. He did not mean to kiss me." She just raised her hands, as if involuntarily, and let them fall at her sides. "You thought that he was stealing me from you. He couldn't; he can't; and nobody can—now, nor ever. His kiss was as pure as the perfume of lilies, pressed close to breathe; it but made sweeter your love and mine, your life and mine."

"Adulteress! With my curses go to him, then, forever!"

The cry brought Hastings round to that other whose presence he had forgotten. But next moment she was down before him; Hastings felt her arms tight clasped about his knees.

"My husband, listen to me!" she implored. "I—we—there is somebody else to be considered." Hastings shuddered. "We—you and I—shall be the parents of a child! I have not told you. For the sake of our child, from you, that child's father, I must ask forgiveness!"

She bowed her head sobbingly against Hastings. He put his hand on her hair and was drawing her up to him when the stranger rushed forward to tear her fiercely away.

"Lies! lies!" the stranger ranted. "Go to him, I tell you! *His* child—his mistress shall not dishonor

my house. Go to him, for he is n't dead, and he needs you — you who are not needed here."

"Don't! don't!" she screamed out to Hastings. "I am your wife, the mother of your — !"

Hastings sprang toward her. He saw that her hands were raised straight up in the air. Just as he was about to reach forth to her, the stranger plunged before him, caught the gray chiffon from her shoulders, and pressed it madly on her throat. Hastings leaped upon him, pulled him away, pinned him to the floor, rolled over him.

She had gone. The room was in darkness.

Hastings felt for the door. It yielded. He opened another door, and stepped through it.

His head swam in the midst of the lights outside. He slunk back like one who hesitates to confront the unknown. The stairs were there before him; he began to descend, his right hand held forth, his eyes fastened in horror upon it. Then, as he heard the distant hum of voices below, once more pompous and erect he swung down the last broad treads between the landing and the floor.

A servant who passed uttered a cry and vanished; but that did not deter him. With long strides he boldly rounded the familiar corner to the dining-room door and entered.

He flourished his right hand wildly in the air. He saw that it was bleeding.

"See, see!" he called to them. "At last he is dead. I have killed him! I have killed him!"

The room seemed to recede in the distance. Something snapped inside his brain. Everything was different. Mr. and Mrs. Elliott, with shrieks of terror, were moving to the pantry-door far at the other end. Confusedly he saw Julia try to force herself toward him; saw her half come, heard his name on her lips. He wanted to smile, he wanted to bend down over her affectionately; but when he sought to reach her with his bloody hand, she shrank back, turned, and fled with the others. He shouted to

them; but he stumbled, and thought he might fall. He caught hold of the table. After that all was blackness.

He awoke amid the appointments of the chamber which Julia had called his room. A quick flood of memories, some clear and accurate, others vague and troublesome, inundated his tired consciousness. Gradually he became aware of a thick, muddy pain rolling in dreadful rhythmic waves through his head. He looked toward the clock on the mantelpiece to see if it was n't time to get up. He met the eyes of Mrs. Elliott. He lifted himself, falling back on the pillow. The pillow was as cold as ice. She came over to him.

"Dear boy — you feel better?"

"Better? Better?" he echoed. "Why are you here?"

"Your head is cooler. You've been — you — my dear child, you may as well know it — you fainted last night — yesterday. You were worn out; you caught cold, and had — a chill. You had n't eaten anything since — not since —" She fondled the bed-clothes. "You'll be all right now. Your head — struck something. The doctor said you weren't to talk —"

It hurt him to move his eyes. The sockets ached. He tried hard to realize what she had told him, repeating snatches of it feverishly over to himself.

"Is it dangerous?" he finally got to the point of asking.

"No; a slight — just a very slight concussion."

"Concussion?" He floundered in the ominous meaning of it until Julia came in. Every time he spoke they begged him not to. She looked so real to him, so natural, so tangibly alive! When she put her face down by his he trembled, and burst out crying like a child. He was afraid she would go away. She sat on the edge of the bed, her hands about one of his. The other hand lay banded on the counterpane.

The next day he was better, but he was n't allowed to get up; and he was secretly not sorry not to have to try. The weakness which followed the first shock had made him submissive to the situation; he began to be used to the fact that he was ill; even the nurse's presence he philosophically accepted, so resigned was he to the necessity. He asked questions concerning his pulse and temperature, wanted to know if the bags of ice could be dispensed with soon. Julia read aloud to him for an hour every morning.

But, having a half-attentive interest in what she read, he would look fixedly at her and try to piece together his jumbled recollections. Partly from lack of strength, mostly because he was loath to admit to anybody that his brain was n't normally clear, he let the questions which rose to his lips pass unuttered. Once he exclaimed irrelevantly:

"Where, Julia, did that portrait come from?" And when he caught the intensity of her stare, he looked around the walls, and, smiling bashfully, concealed his embarrassment by saying, "I'm really listening, but I must have dozed for a second." At times he would gaze wonderingly at the ceiling, lose himself following the lines of the panels, or counting the little square panes in the window-sashes. He sometimes slept, but not quite soundly; half his somnolence was busy with irrational calculations beyond his control.

A musty smell elusively kept fading as soon as he was aware of breathing it; a dim room, in which the windows were shut close and the shades pulled down, drifted through his quick fancy into darkness; he would find himself deliriously sorting many strange garments into piles, counting them, opening drawers to take others out, until the accumulations drove him to despair. His right hand throbbed under the tight bandage; he kept fingering the bandage and pressing on the sore spots. Everything about him would seem suddenly definite and real as compared with the dismal bewilderment of his dreamings.

Perhaps the doctor would enter, with professional cheerfulness. But then, right in the middle of answering some question, Hastings would be blinded by a great rush of bright light through the opened door.

A day came when all this phantasmagoria ceased to bother him; with returning vigor he had to make less and less effort to forget it, until at last it altogether went. The joy of new health swept over him, filling the gaps and low, miasmic areas of his mentality, as the rising tide fills the empty pools of the shore.

III

It was a month after the day of John Hastings's arrival at Rockface. Unlike that day, the weather was sunny and mild; big cumulus clouds moved languidly through the sky, as if it were midsummer instead of late October. Julia was crocheting, and he was watching her. They were sitting in front of the house on a leaf-strewn grass-plot near the avenue between the lines of larches that, now calm in the windless forenoon, stretched diagonally from the street to the corners of the bland old façade.

"But if you knew all along," he, with his habitual freshness of wonder, put to her, "that it was, that it *is*, really Mr. Eberdeen's house, why in the name of things did n't you tell me *then*?"

She became irritatingly absorbed in her work.

"I thought," she at length said, "that you were pretending not to know, and I wanted, in that case, to discover what other — what else you might be holding back from me."

"Holding back from you? What *else*?" he echoed. "What else was there?"

"I was n't sure, you see. Nothing that I knew," she affirmed frankly, laughing away the sudden rigor of sadness on his face. "There was another reason, though. There was something which I had been saving for the

very last moment to show you. But I was rather ashamed of wanting to so much, and, after the way you had taken the rest of the house, I hesitated. Just as I finally was going to, lunch was ready — remember?"

Hastings awkwardly withdrew his right hand, which had been resting palm downward on his knee, and thrust it into his pocket.

"Julia," he cried out, in characteristic disregard of all context, "suppose Mr. Eberdeen should turn out to have been — well — a relative, or something? It might account, you know, for my asking that question, and — and for how everything here" — he looked inclusively round him — "for how this all impressed me so."

She waited, hopeful of the time having at last come when he might wish to confide in her whatever it was — if, indeed, he knew — that had happened; but he only ingenuously continued to hold out to her the possibility of his new idea.

"No," she told him, with a disappointment which she could n't conceal, "he was n't. I've looked up his entire history. He died right here, and he had no children. *Your* pedigree I know by heart."

Hastings smiled at her thoroughness.

"What," he exclaimed, "if some unrecorded forebear of mine has eluded you? Somebody," he dreamily improvised, "who knew this house, who was familiar with every turn of the road, every habit of the mist. It's just such a smug little, old, weather-worn town like Rock-face, where any New Englander is likely to find traces of forgotten ancestors."

The sound of footsteps made them both look toward the gate.

"Who is it? Why is he coming here?" Julia demanded half-indignantly under her breath.

"The same old man I met, but so much older!" whispered Hastings, unexpectedly puzzled whether to welcome or dread this intrusion.

"I have searched the streets through for him ever

since," she remonstrated; "I have asked everybody I saw, and no one in the whole place could tell me of any old man answering his description."

They watched his slow, difficult approach over the gravel. He came forward without making the slightest recognition of their presence. Stopping full in front of them, he took off his hat, applied a straggling red handkerchief uncertainly to his face, and stared up at the house-front.

"They tell me," he muttered, not once looking at either of his interlocutors, "that yer've been and sold it. So yer could n't stand it, eh, after all? It's what Al Makepeace said 'u'd be the case. Looks innocent, though, as herself did, now, don't it?"

"We've sold it," Julia protested, "only because — because we can't stay here. Jack — Mr. Hastings — and I are going to be married. We are going to live in Europe. My father and mother did n't want —"

"Yer can't make a new dog out of an old dog, ner learn an old dog new tricks," he went on disregardingly; "and I guess it's the same fur's houses be concerned."

"Who are you, anyway?" Hastings asked, getting up to offer the old man a chair.

"Who am I?" the old man echoed, suddenly attentive. "Dear me, dear me! Whose father was it as planted — and I had his own word fer it — all these 'ere tam'rack trees, and dug the well by the south door? And seen the lady of the house herself, mind yer, go out 'tween them stone posts fer the last time — and darker than pitch it was, too — on her way that night she went to meet Henry —"

At this point the old man was seized by a fit of coughing. When he recovered from it, he just stood there, gazing ahead of him, shaken with the palsy of years, so that he failed to heed the questions they thrice repeated to him.

"No wonder yer could n't sleep in it, with her curse on the big empty halls! When the crops themselves

died the night afterward, without a sign of a frost comin' down to touch them! It was the devil's own guilt in her that did it, Al says. Poor man! poor man! And yer tried ter dress it all up like a corpse, as if yer thought it was dead; but it came to life on yer, did it?" he mumbled, laughing incomprehensibly to himself. "When yer leavin'? To-morrer? Sooner the better fer yer, I guess. Good-day." With which imprecation the old man turned, feebly put on his hat, and dragged himself back down the avenue whence he had come.

They saw the last vestige of him disappear forever.

"He's like a broken spirit brooding over the neighborhood," Hastings said, shivering despite himself.

Julia began to crochet again, nervously absorbed in what she was doing.

"His scattered, crazy words are like the last gasp of the little village. How he epitomizes all the cramped, pent-up emotions of the starved inhabitants who have gone — all the passions that must have so dreadfully burnt themselves out here, with nothing to note but the shifting of the winds or the digging of some well! They who were obliged, from sheer ennui, to create dramas out of their Puritan prejudices. Can't you breathe contagion in the very atmosphere? Julia, I've had enough of it; I'm glad we're going. If I stayed here a month longer, I should get to feel as indigenous as that gnarled old apple-tree; the ghosts of the soil would claim me."

She stood up and walked away from him across the gravel avenue, as if doing so might help her to seize this occasion for what she had decided at last to tell him. She realized that she must be quick, that in another hour her parents' return might end this one good opportunity for which she had longed and waited.

"Jack dear," she said, moving back toward him, seeing how her own excitement was reflected in the way he, too, had arisen and taken a few steps towards her, "to-morrow is our last day, and there's something that we must talk about before we go."

His head was bowed, his eyes focused tensely up at hers, his arms hanging beside him; the sensitive smile hovered more and more dimly on his lips; his whole body swayed imperceptibly, like the beating of a pulse.

"Jack," she got out, going still closer to him, "I want to show you — Mrs. Eberdeen's room."

He would never quite realize the fullness of the shock it gave him; no deliberate attack could have been so vulnerably aimed, and the completeness of the blow was the greater for being one which he had been unwittingly preparing all along to receive. The house looked miles away; far over it three ducks flew southward.

On the landing above the broad part of the staircase they paused a moment. Instead of going up the left branch, which led to Jack's door, she took him to the right, where, at the head of the stairs, there was another door directly opposite his. As soon as he saw it he went forward quickly and turned the knob. It stuck; it was locked; and rather timorously he stepped back to meet Julia's searching look as she handed him a rusty old key.

The musty smell poured out on them like the damp from an opened vault.

She took his hand. They stepped across the threshold.

He saw the lithograph of the two kittens, age-worn and time-blurred, still crooked on the wall beside the bureau; there was the sand-shaker on the maple desk; there hung the yellowed print of the "Last Supper" above the fireplace — all stark and ghostly in that uncannily late afternoon light, which not even the morning sun could dispel.

He clutched her hand. He looked at the bed, which had n't been smoothed or touched since he had lain in it a month ago. He remembered it as uncomprehendingly as one remembers mislaying a lost object in a forgotten place. He remembered waking. But the rest he had done was lost in the shadows.

"So this is where it happened — *here!* How have I ever been in this room before?"

"*What* happened?" she asked him eagerly, firmly.

"I fainted—before I was sick. But why—why here?" he begged.

She had prepared her answer; she had many times rehearsed it; but the words now served inadequately.

"You had n't eaten anything," she stated softly. "You had n't slept. You had a fever, and your brain was so tired from—from everything that when you started for *your* room,—the one opposite, which I had shown to you,—you carelessly turned to the right, and came into this room instead, which I had n't had a chance yet to tell you about. Have n't you ever known, *since*, that you did it?"

He shook his head.

"This was Mrs. Eberdeen's room," she went on. "It has always been just like this,—at least I think it has,—always, since the house was built. I kept it as a curiosity. I called it Mrs. Eberdeen's room because the natives said she was wicked and had brought ruin to the house. I reasoned that this was why nobody had taken these things away or changed them—the wall-paper, I mean, the bed, the carpet, the pictures. And there's precisely one thing," she impetuously concluded, as if she could n't postpone longer telling him, "that I myself have added."

Hastings smiled wanly at her. She guided him round to the wall at the side of the door in front of which they had been standing; she started to speak again before she saw what it was to which she had referred; and so her own words prevented her from hearing the smothered sound of his recognition.

"I found this," she said, trying to speak carelessly and forcing herself steadfastly to regard it, "in an old shop twelve miles down the Poochuck Road. Isn't it quaint? I got it—because, Jack, it looked like you, and— and because it exactly fitted this panel!"

But her attempted gaiety sank dismally in the silence which followed. They just stood there. The minutes thudded by; the mustiness enwrapped them. Outside

the window a dead piece of branch fell crackling to the ground. Gradually he grew to be unaware of her presence, so sharp and rapid were the currents which successively swept him; and her petty curiosity, all her poor need for speculation, was lost in the depth of the spell cast over him now. She dared not look at him, she dared not take her eyes off the object before them.

It was crudely painted. It was the portrait of a young man dressed a hundred or more years ago. He seemed to be walking forward out of the picture. In many places the pigment was so nearly gone that the brown fuzz of canvas showed through. The colors clung as delicate as cobwebs to the stern face and erect stalwart figure.

"Who is it?" Hastings articulated, scarce audibly. But though he had to ask, if only to save himself from going mad, his words were no more than frail signals of his distress, for he knew that he alone knew the answer. Electrically, crashingly, it had been borne in upon him at almost the first instant of his beholding them where it was that he had seen before those tightly compressed lips, with the mole still visible near the corner; he knew those calm, cruel eyes, still averted from his own; in a flash he had identified the purple satin waistcoat.

"You, Jack," — she faced him determinedly — "you looked like *him*; you were like him, absolutely, in every detail, when you came into the dining-room!"

"When I came —" he repeated at a loss.

"Yes. It was n't here, in this room, that you fainted. You went outside, down the stairs. Elizabeth saw you. You pushed open the dining-room door. Mother, father, I — we all saw you come in, wearing clothes like *these*," she pointed.

"Yes, yes, yes. I remember; I did put them on."

"But you did n't, you could n't have! O Jack, don't you understand me? You were n't *really* wearing them!"

All at once he felt something crunch beneath his feet,

and he looked down, then back up at the portrait. The large square of glass which apparently once covered it had been shattered; there were a few triangles still sticking in the edge of the frame; the rest was in smaller bits on the floor. Instinctively he brought his right hand to a level with his face, and saw the scar upon it.

"It's a mystery, Jack dear. Can't you see it is? And it is so much more interesting never to explain it," she essayed fearfully, feigning a laugh of regained naturalness. "We shall never, never find out who he was, by whom it was painted, or what made you break it, or why —"

"Ah," he shouted eagerly, defying, as the memories came crowding into his brain, the doubts which had freshly assailed him. "I told you it might be possible! And he did have, after all — for that man was the father of her child!"

"Whose child?" Julia gasped.

But love and pity for her whom he could not name kept him from answering. And in the drift of his silence the vision capriciously failed him. He looked at Julia. He looked back at the wall. It was nothing but a funny old picture which hung there confronting them. The commonplaceness, beside it, of Julia's long-drawn expression made him snicker, until, as a result of this accidental reaction, they were both actually giggling aloud.

He turned away from her. She watched him cross to the bureau. He pulled out each one of the drawers in turn. He peered blankly into them, where there was only the smell of mold and whirring dust to greet his pains.

He persistently scanned the room again. What had become of the hat-tub? Why had the Chinese water-jug gone from the squalid little wash-stand? Baffled and solemn, he went back over to her.

"Have n't you taken some things away?"

"Nothing. Not even so much as a splinter. What are you trying to find?"

Timidly catching her hand he cried:

"Come with me, please." And he drew her to the closet door. But when he opened it, he let go her hand in his amazement.

A slit of window at the far end let in a ray of sun. There were rows and rows of wooden hooks, but there seemed nothing on them. Steeling himself boldly to view it, he turned to where there might have dangled that calico bag stuffed with pieces against which the stranger had leaned. He went forward and felt over the empty spaces to satisfy himself.

"Yes, Julia," he slowly brought out, "you are right; it was a dream—a mystery." And he nodded vacantly to her.

"If only, Jack, you could remember it all!"

She stretched out her arms to him. But just as she was coming nearer, he caught sight of something lying between them on the floor. He darted for it, picked it up, and ran with it out of the shadow. Then, in terror, he saw that it was a piece of crumpled gray chiffon, and that there were the stains of blood upon it.